

**VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL
COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE**

Constitution Gardens, 21st Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C.

Report to the National Park Service

May 2, 2002

Abstract

The National Park Service, on behalf of the American Battle Monuments Commission and the Vietnam Memory Project, has submitted a proposal for the location and design of a Memory Commemorative Plaque at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The U.S. Congress passed legislation that required the addition of a plaque at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to commemorate those who served in Vietnam and died after the war as a result of their service. The location and design of the plaque is a result of site analysis and studies conducted by a coalition of veterans' organizations that included the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, and the Vietnam War In Memory Memorial, Inc. It was determined that the plaque should be located in the immediate vicinity of the existing Three Servicemen Statue Plaza on the memorial grounds.

Authority

The Commemorative Works Act (40 U.S.C. 1007), as amended by Public Law 106-214)

Commission Action

The Commission:

- **Approves** the location and the preliminary and final design plans for a commemorative plaque to be placed at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Constitution Gardens, 21st Street and Constitution Avenue, NW, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.43(73.10)-41025.
- **Reiterates** its October 8, 1992 and November 7, 1991 positions that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is complete and should not be altered by the addition of any other memorial elements.

BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The National Park Service (NPS), on behalf of the American Battle Monuments Commission and the Vietnam Memory Project, Inc. has submitted a proposal to add a plaque at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to commemorate those who served in Vietnam and died, after the conclusion of the war, as a result of their service.

Functional Program

Public Law 106-214, the legislation that authorized the plaque, stipulates that:

- It shall commemorate those who died after their service in the Vietnam War, but as a direct result of that service, and whose names are not otherwise eligible for placement on the Memorial Wall.
- It shall be of a size that is not less than six square feet or larger than 18 square feet.

Design Program

The objective of the design program is to ensure that the plaque maintains the merit of the existing memorial while honorably commemorating the intended victims. It is anticipated that the design will:

- Provide a dignified presence.
- Respect the design logic of the existing memorial elements.
- Provide a sense of integration with the existing memorial elements.
- Not be misunderstood as a dedication statement for any of the existing memorial elements.
- Develop a sensitive design relationship between the plaque and the existing memorial.
- Provide an area to visit the plaque.
- Fit in and be compatible with the existing maintenance program in the memorial grounds.
- Respect the existing plan for the memorial grounds.
- Preserve and enhance existing vegetation.

- Minimize additional paving, lighting, maintenance requirements, and distracting pedestrian control devices.

Location

The proposed plaque would be located at the northeast corner of the Three Servicemen Statue Plaza. This would require that the existing plaza be extended three feet to accommodate the plaque and its viewing area, as well as photographers at the existing site. Landscaping would also be extended approximately three feet to properly frame the new plaque.

Plaque

The plaque would be 24 inches tall by 36 inches wide. The typeface of the inscription would match that on the memorial wall and be inscribed into a monolithic gray granite stone that would match the adjacent paving. The inscription would be filled with black grout to provide a finish that is legible from all sides and in all light conditions.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

At its October 8, 1992 meeting, the Commission approved the preliminary and final design plans for the Vietnam Women's Memorial. At this time, the Commission also reiterated its November 7, 1991 position that with the addition of the Vietnam Women's Memorial to the setting of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the overall memorial is now complete and should not be altered by the addition of any other memorial elements.

EVALUATION

Staff recommends approval of the proposed location and preliminary and final design plans of the plaque at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. As indicated in the "Previous Commission Action" section of this report, the Commission stated that it considered the Vietnam Veterans Memorial complete at the time it approved the Vietnam Women's Memorial. It further stated that the overall memorial should not be altered by the addition of any other memorial elements. The current proposal is in response to Congressional legislation that provides for placement of a plaque within the site of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Commission is seeking the best way to accommodate that intent. As such, the location of the plaque should be in harmony with existing memorial elements and not dilute the overall Vietnam Veterans Memorial setting. The challenge to locating the proposed plaque is to place it in an area that relates to, and is visually linked to, the other elements of the memorial. The proposed location and design for the plaque will accomplish several important objectives:

- It is adjacent to the heaviest memorial circulation route and it occurs sequentially for visitors as they move from the statue area to the memorial wall.

- It has a good visual relationship with the memorial wall, statue and flagpole, and a partial view of the Women's Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Also, it would not block the dynamic tension of views between the statues and the memorial wall.
- It would have minimal impact on existing pedestrian circulation patterns and the proposed plaza expansion would provide additional space for visitors.
- The site is far enough east of the statue to have shaded space in the morning, thereby allowing for visitors to pause and reflect.
- It would provide enough space for the temporary placement of mementos.
- The proposed design would require minimum grading and impact on existing drainage and trees.

The overall integrity of the existing memorial elements (memorial wall, Three Servicemen Statue, flagpole, and Vietnam Women's Memorial) would be maintained because the new plaque would be strategically "inserted" into the area near the Three Servicemen Statue. It allows the best relationship to the existing memorial, with no visual intrusion and relatively little disturbance to existing conditions. Given the small size of the proposed plaque, it is better to co-locate the smaller memorial elements than to disperse them throughout the Vietnam Veterans Memorial site. The objective is to eliminate "clutter."

Regarding the design of the plaque, its 2-foot by 3-foot size is appropriate and the use of monolithic gray granite stone, matching the existing adjacent paving, is compatible with its immediate environment. The typeface matches that on the memorial wall and filling the inscription with black grout provides a finish that would be legible from all sides and in all lighting conditions. The words of the inscription are simple and direct, and their powerful message is left for the visitor to interpret, similar to the other abstract elements of the memorial.

In summary, staff believes that the proposed site and design of the commemorative plaque is an appropriate solution to accommodating the requirements of Public Law 106-214, and therefore, recommends approval.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on April 10, 2002 and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Department of Public Works; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

At its April 18, 2002 meeting, the Commission of Fine Arts approved the location and design of the Commemorative Plaque at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is located on the Mall, which is designated Monumental Park in the Parks, Opens Space and Natural Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan and as a Special Place in the Preservation and Historic Features Element. Applicable policies in these elements to the proposed plaque location and design plans specify:

The Mall Complex should primarily serve as a formal setting for the Capitol, the White House, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, and the Tidal Basin and should be maintained as a large, landscaped, open, and ecologically significant area. It should also serve as a heritage education center and meet passive/leisure and active recreational needs of visitors and residents, to the extent that its primary purpose is not compromised.

Monuments, Parks and Designed Landscapes...should serve as settings to enhance public buildings, monuments, and memorials; as such, their fundamental integrity should be protected...

Special Streets and places should be maintained and enhanced in a manner that promotes their roles as major features that help establish the images and the symbols of the National Capital in the minds of its residents and visitors...

The proposed plaque would be a compatible and complementary feature added to the existing memorial and is consistent with these policies.

National Historic Preservation Act

NPS has concluded its Section 106 consultation with the DC State Historic Preservation Office (DC SHPO), determining that the addition of the plaque and the accompanying site plans would have no adverse effect on the National Register qualities of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Constitution Gardens, or West Potomac Park. The DC SHPO concurred with this determination.

National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), NPS has reviewed the potential environmental effects of the proposed action.

The existing site is not subject to flooding or any unusual subsurface conditions. Circulation routes for pedestrian traffic are reasonably accommodated at the existing site.

In accordance with the NPS Environmental Compliance Guide, Section 3.4(C), the proposed new commemorative plaque is Categorical Excluded in compliance with NEPA regulations.